



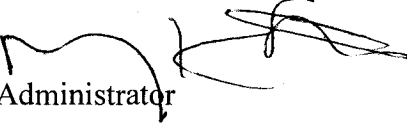
UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

SEP 26 2011

OFFICE OF WATER

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Healthy Watersheds Initiative: A National Framework and Action Plan

FROM: Nancy K. Stoner 
Acting Assistant Administrator

TO: Regional Administrators
Regions 1-10

I am pleased to send to you the *Healthy Watersheds Initiative National Framework and Action Plan*. It is a particular pleasure to be sending this document to you, because unlike many National Initiatives, this National Framework and Action Plan is an outgrowth of trail blazing work done by many states over the past decade or more to better protect their high quality state waters. In this case, the states have led the way and the Office of Water is building upon that work to encourage these efforts across the Nation. The *Healthy Watersheds Initiative National Framework and Action Plan* is a collaborative product of the EPA headquarters and the regions and our state and federal partners with input from non-governmental organizations. State partners include both the Association of Clean Water Administrators agencies and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The *Action Plan* presents a clear, consistent framework for action, both internally among our own programs and externally in working with our partners. The *Action Plan* describes the HWI, including its vision, guiding principles, goals and objectives; and presents an implementation framework for actions by the EPA headquarters, Regions, and States.

As part of a well-balanced national water program, we must continue to work with states, tribes and other partners and stakeholders to protect healthy watersheds if we are to meet our strategic goal of protecting and restoring watersheds and aquatic ecosystems (EPA Strategic Plan Goal Two, Objective Two). Administrator Jackson, in *Coming Together for Clean Water*, called for a leap forward in water quality akin to the one precipitated with the passage of the CWA in 1972. The resulting *The EPA's Strategy to Protect America's Waters*, identified an increased focus on protecting healthy waters and watersheds as a key action for achieving our clean water goals.

The Healthy Watersheds Initiative (HWI) can greatly improve our ability to protect aquatic ecosystems by using a systems approach to more fully protect the chemical, physical, and biological integrity or ecological integrity of the Nation's waters. The Committee Report written in support of the 1972 Federal Water Pollution Control Act amendments clarified that the term, *integrity* "refers to a condition in which the natural structure and function of ecosystems is [sic]

maintained.”¹ The HWI acknowledges that our waters and aquatic ecosystems are dynamic systems that are interconnected in the landscape. We recognize that while we may protect their parts (e.g. water chemistry) or stream segments independently, it is also important to protect them as whole, interconnected systems that include hydrologic, geomorphic and other processes.

The HWI is a non-regulatory and voluntary initiative whose key elements are to:

- 1) Work with our state and other partners to identify healthy watersheds state-wide and to develop and implement healthy watershed protection plans that set priorities and leverage programs and resources across state agencies and their partners,
- 2) Integrate protection of healthy watersheds into EPA programs, and
- 3) Increase awareness and understanding of the importance of protecting our remaining healthy watersheds including the ecological services, economic benefits and cost savings they provide and the range of management actions needed to protect and avoid adverse impacts to those healthy watersheds.

I strongly encourage you to continue to work with your state and other partners to help implement the HWI as a priority for the Water Program. Some regions are already developing and implementing healthy watersheds strategies in accordance with the National Water Program Guidance FY 12 Measure WQ-22a and I encourage all regions to do so. Activities underway include regions working with states to: (1) develop state healthy watershed strategies, (2) assess and protect instream flow and landscape condition, and (3) tie this work to programs such as source water protection and antidegradation.

A Water Program that not only restores impaired waters but also considers as a priority the protection of healthy watersheds, including the maintenance of restored waters, is a balanced program that should allow us to meet our Strategic Plan Objectives efficiently and cost-effectively. I look forward to working with you, our state partner organizations, Association of Clean Water Administrators and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and other Federal and non-Federal partners in implementing the *Healthy Watersheds Initiative National Framework and Action Plan 2011*. If you have any questions, please contact me or have your staff contact the HWI program manager, Laura Gabanski, at (202) 566-1179.

Attachment

cc: OW Office Directors
 Water Division Directors, Regions 1-10
 Large Aquatic Ecosystem Directors
 Association of Clean Water Administrators
 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies

¹ U.S. Government Printing Office. Report for the Committee on Public Works-United States House of Representatives with additional and supplemental views of H.R. 11896 to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. House Report 92-911, 92nd Congress, 2nd session, 11 March 1972, page 149.